

PR

4515

C7B8

1894

W. Hare

NSX

American Issue

A BUNDLE OF LIFE.

Pseudonym Library.

THE
PSEUDONYM LIBRARY.

1. MAKAR'S DREAM.
2. HERB OF LOVE.
3. HEAVY LADEN.
4. THE SAGHALIEN CONVICT.
5. THE SCHOOL OF ART.
6. A BUNDLE OF LIFE.

JOHN OLIVER HOBBS

A BUNDLE OF LIFE



NEW YORK
J. SELWIN TAIT AND SONS
65 FIFTH AVENUE
1894

PR

4515

C7B8

1894

COPYRIGHT
J. SELWIN TAIT AND SONS
1893

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
MAY
26
1984

A BUNDLE OF LIFE

BY

JOHN OLIVER HOBBS

AUTHOR OF "SINNER'S COMEDY," "SOME EMOTIONS
AND A MORAL," "A STUDY IN TEMPTATIONS,"
ETC.



PROLOGUE.

I.

SIR SIDNEY WARCOP was a gentleman who had been born with many good and perfect gifts, but he had pawned them to his Adversary for a few casks of brandy and a little soda. In his early manhood he had been considered a handsome, dashing young buck of the old school, a three-bottle hero, a sad dog, an irresistible rake—a good-hearted devil. Now he was reformed, however, and reformation had meant in

his case, as in that of many, the substitution of many disagreeable virtues for a few atoning sins. Once over-generous, he was now frugal ; once fearless, he was now discreet ; once too loving, he was now indifferent ; once a zealot, he was now unprejudiced ; once candid, he was now abysmal—in a phrase, he was the embodiment of gentlemanly correctness, well-bred honor, and polite religion.

At the age of six and twenty he had surprised society in two ways : first, by running away with his enemy's wife ; and secondly, by marrying the lady on the death, some months later, of her distracted husband. Eighteen years had now passed and, by living in close retirement, Lady Warcop was become a much-sought-after person. She had suddenly inherited, too, a considerable fortune, and as views on mar-

riage are only immoral (as it would seem) when one cannot afford to pay for them, it was not so much a question whether her ladyship would be received, but whether she would receive. And she gave such delicious dinners! The early transgression of Sir Sidney and his wife was forgotten, and their daughter (whose age was a subject delicately avoided by the feeling and discreet world), was receiving her education in a convent abroad. It is possible that she would have remained there always and ended her life as a nun, but for the great interest most unexpectedly shown in her welfare by a rich and childless aunt—her mother's own sister—Mrs. Constance Charlotte Portcullis.

The heart of Mrs. Portcullis was, as it were, a moral scent-sachet, which she refilled with the fashionable perfume of each season, scatter-

ing the musk of the old year to make room for the myrrh of the new. This custom—which is commonly called Toleration—won for her numberless acquaintances of every rank and opinion, among whom it would it have been hard to decide, which expressed his or her contempt for the lady's uncertain principles, in the most affectionate manner. Mrs. Portcullis had, nevertheless, one fixed and unalterable idea, and that had reference to Lady Warcop. She held that her appalling conduct had brought perpetual disgrace on that distinguished family the Tracy Tottenhams, of which she and her ladyship were members. Years passed and the sisters never met. Mrs. Portcullis, of Belgrave Square, and Lady Warcop, of Curzon Street, were a new heaven and a new earth asunder.

They were brought together at last in a street accident. Mrs. Portcullis was thrown out of her victoria and driven home half insensible in Lady Warcop's brougham, which, by a dispensation of Providence or the interference of Satan, happened to be passing at the time of the catastrophe. On recovery from the shock Charlotte felt constrained to write to her sister in pious and forbearing terms—

“Since the Almighty,” she wound up, “has, in accordance with His inscrutable Principles, chosen a weak and sinful agent for the accomplishment of His all-merciful design (the preservation of my life), I must accept this as a sign that He desires me to unbend from my former attitude of just, if reluctant, severity. If He has seen fit to forgive you for the disgrace and reproach you have

brought on our once stainless name, my duty as a Christian forbids me to make any further comment on your crime. But I cannot refrain from adding that my unceasing prayers for your repentance have no doubt furthered, more than it would become me to say, this miracle of grace.

“ I will receive you this day week between two and four.

“ Your affectionate sister,

“ C. C. PORTCULLIS.”

Like Lady Lurewell in the comedy, Mrs. Portcullis could dress up a sin so religiously that the devil himself would hardly know it of his making. It is certain that she deceived herself, and on reading over the foregoing she almost felt the prick of her immortal wings—which prick, as Plato tells us, is to the soul what the cutting of teeth is to the infant.

But Lady Warcop's state of mind on receiving the letter, and her consequent remarks to the effect that Charlotte always was a hypocrite, a cat, and a fool, need not be insisted on here ; for, remembering Charlotte's wealth and several others matters, she wrote her reply in so meek and quiet a spirit that the hasty utterances of her unconsidering tongue shall not be known till the last Judgment. Although, as we have said, Lady Warcop had gained for herself a certain sneaking acknowledgment from so-called good society, her own sister's refusal to recognise her had always been a stumbling-block. There were still many desirable acquaintances who would not wink until Mrs. Portcullis winked, and this consideration was of such moment to Blanche, who only lived now to meet the right people in the right

way, that rather than miss the chance of reconciliation with Charlotte, she would have performed even a more severe penance than did Henry II. at the shrine of St. Thomas of Canterbury. So giving much incidental praise to the Creator, but much more to Mrs. Portcullis, she wrote to say that she would call at Belgrave Square on the day and between the hours named in Charlotte's most kind letter, and, begging her to continue her fervent supplications to Heaven, she remained her devoted, if unworthy, sister Blanche. She displayed very correct taste, Charlotte thought, in omitting the ill-gotten name of Warcop.

II.

LADY WARCOP was a woman of medium stature, elegant mould, and cautious smiles. Deep-set blue

eyes and a very low brow, a nose inclined to the Roman, and a telling mouth ; a smooth, rather pale complexion and innocent fair hair were the most remarkable points of a countenance which fascinated reason and looked reproach at distrust. At least seven years younger than Sir Sidney, and of singularly youthful appearance, she affected an artless manner and displayed now that childish merriment not seen in children, and now that rudeness which passes for sincerity and is usually found in the disingenuous. A being with many emotions but no heart, with ideas but no thoughts, there was so little, even in her folly, to excite interest, that, in calling her stupid, friends said their best and enemies their worst of her character. But the strong force in Lady Warcop was her sex : weak, untruthful, cowardly, and malicious,

she was still no more than woman may be, and it was no slight virtue—though a negative one—to have kept this feminine quality, to have retained—after a life of sham passions and passionate shams—that indefinable Eve-like pathos which from the beginning conquered—and until the end will conquer—the rigour of strict criticism.

Mrs. Portcullis, on the other hand, was big-boned, loud-voiced, and mighty, and so aggressive in her merits that she would have been more acceptable and pleasant for one of Lady Warcop's cowering faults. Her high, white forehead and long chin gave her a grand and monumental air, which her widow's cap, crape robes, and such-like paraphernalia of woe made the more emphatic.

The meeting between these two ladies, who had hated each other so

long and so cordially, was of the most edifying and tender nature. Blanche, who had intended to be dignified though pious, fell to miserable weeping, and Charlotte, touched by what she supposed was the sacrifice of a contrite heart, pronounced, goddess-like, a solemn benediction on Blanche's bowed head. Lady Warcop's tears, however, were those of suppressed rage and spite, and Charlotte's comfortable words, "I will make no reference to the past," sent her into fresh spasms of grief. She remembered every quarrel of their earliest childhood : how Charlotte had always been the "good" one, the "forgiving" one, the one "who would grow up a comfort to her parents," the one who conscientiously picked plums out of her cake because they were bad for her—which plums, by-the-by, she used

to drop on the plate of the less self-controlled Blanche. Not vainly, alas! But then, Charlotte did not like the taste of plums, preferring caraway seeds! The plum story loomed big in Lady Warcop's brain, and she howled—not for her own sins, but at the remembrance of Charlotte's treachery some thirty years before, when they both wore pinafores, and were only learning to be hypocrites.

“I would not have known you,” sobbed her ladyship, “how you have changed! What trouble you must have had! Oh, Charlotte! and to meet after all these years—two old women! When I was last in this room you wore a mauve silk and it went so well with your complexion—you used to have such a beautiful colour and there was not a line on your face—or at least there were only a few; but now—who

would think you were the same creature? ”

“ You are more fortunate than I am,” said Mrs. Portcullis, smiling horribly, “ for you have a grown-up daughter to remind us of your lost attractions ! ”

Blanche gasped, but although she felt the weight of Charlotte’s blow she was not sufficiently skilled herself to appreciate its science.

“ Oh,” she said, growing red, “ do you mean Teresa ? ”

“ Surely,” quoth her sister, in a tone of horror, “ there is but one I could mean ! ”

Lady Warcop lifted her eyes and gazed as bravely as she dared at the miniature of the late William Duncan Portcullis which reposed on Charlotte’s adamantine breast. This miniature, however, only served to produce in Blanche the kind

of panic which we may suppose would fill any weak creature who saw scalps adorning the person of a warlike adversary.

“Tell me about Teresa,” said Mrs. Portcullis, choosing the subject most humiliating to her sister.

“She is at school.”

“I understood she was in a convent.”

“Yes,” faltered Lady Warcop, “there is a school in the convent!”

“From a Romish point of view such equivocation, I know, is not considered disgraceful. Our religion, thank God, is not so easy! You must send for her at once. She is, if I remember rightly, eighteen and a half, and, not to hurt your feelings, she can only retrieve the lamentable circumstances of her birth by making a good marriage. Although we have not met, my dear Blanche, you have been

ever in my mind, and the alteration in my appearance which you find so startling is, no doubt, miraculously evident to you because your disgrace has been its sole cause. Blessed with the kindest of husbands and a good conscience, I have had, nevertheless, a constant sorrow—that sorrow was my sister's shame. Oh! do not suppose I utter this as a reproach! I name it because I think my long years of grief give me the right to express a very strong opinion on the subject of your unhappy child's education and future. Your own sense will tell you that she must be guarded far more strictly than other girls. For instance, she must not be seen at balls, theaters, race-courses, country houses, or the like, but must rest content with dinners, oratorios, and good works for the poor."

“You are too kind,” said Lady Warcop, who had listened with astonishing patience to her sister’s speech, “but I do not wish Teresa to leave the convent at present. She is extremely happy there, and I can only wish that at her age I might have found such a peaceful home far removed from the temptations and wickedness of this deceitful world! As for her marrying, I have too much reason to regret my own early marriage—the cause of all my trouble—to wish the poor child to risk a similar mistake.”

“You did not leave dear Douglas for a richer man!” said Mrs. Portcullis, in a tone which implied that if Blanche had made a more discreet choice, her sin would have been less odious.

“Perhaps not,” said Blanche; “but I left a man who did not understand me for one who—— You

know, Charlotte, that Sidney could make himself very agreeable. There were many women who would have been far readier than I was to run away with him. Indeed, he has often said that it was my resistance which chiefly excited his admiration, and if I had not been so firm on *my* side, he would not have been so determined on *his*. I saw that from the first, and I cannot tell you the *hours* we spent arguing the matter from every possible point of view. He used a great deal of persuasion (and you may be sure I would not have wasted a thought on him if he had not), but I took the final step with great reluctance. We may have been foolish, but we meant no wrong. I was unhappy; he was kind to me; we were both young."

"Sir Sidney was certainly young," said Mrs. Portcullis. "As for you, I can make no excuse on the ground

of your age, for I always blame the woman in such cases, and, to my mind, it does not matter in the least whether she be sixteen or sixty. But it is a subject I must refuse to discuss with you, since, in the nature of things, it is inexpressibly painful to me. Let us return to the pressing and all-important question of Teresa's future. I would suggest that you send for her at once, and then you may bring her with you to a small dinner I am giving on the twentieth. The Dundrys, the Paget-Herons, and a few other old friends of mine are coming."

Blanche, who had been hopelessly hoping these many years for a smile of recognition from the Lady Dundry (known among her intimates as "Arabella, dowdy, but exclusive"), no sooner heard that magic name than her whole demeanor changed. The little dignity and resolution she

had assumed fell like a veil, and it was soon agreed between the two women that Teresa should be sent for on the morrow.

“The nuns must bring her to London,” said Blanche, “for Sidney hates the Channel, and it is death to *me*.”

Yet she had crossed it on the great occasion of her elopement.

III.

FOUR days after this interview between Lady Warcop and her sister, Sir Sidney might have been seen making his way towards Bedford Row. In person he was unusually handsome, his head and features reminding one in a striking degree of the popular representation of Cicero, while his extraordinarily brilliant blue eyes and lively hair did full justice to his Celtic origin. As in the case of Agamemnon, there

were many men taller than he, but in a crowd he was not to be matched for grace and majesty of movement. There was, however, a certain studied ease in his gestures, a premeditated charm in his manner, which to those who disagreed with his politics made insincerity seem the sincerest thing about him. But if he had not a guileless soul, he had at least immaculate linen, which so dazzled the spectator by its purity that to a cynical mind it might have seemed that in this generation a good laundress is more useful than a clean record.

When Sir Sidney entered the private office of Mr. Robert Waddilove (of the firm of Waddilove, Shorncliffe, Shorncliffe, and Pride, Solicitors), Mr. Waddilove rose from his chair, bowed, and remembered the time when he would have called on his client and trifled away a

pleasant morning with scandal, choice cigars, incomparable sherry, and a "little matter of business," which came last and was invariably left "to your discretion, Waddilove." But now, oh heavy change! Even as the Baronet entered he looked at his watch.

"Not detain you ten minutes," he said, speaking rapidly, and as though he were dictating a telegram. "Not legal, but domestic. Wife most annoying. Teresa coming home. Wife in hysterics every time girl's name is mentioned. No living in the house."

Waddilove rubbed his chin. He was a man of middle age, short, but so compactly built that to look at him made one think of bricks and cement. His quick brown eyes were remarkable for their curiously mingled expression of shrewdness, scepticism, and good humor, and

his wry mouth showed that if he drank in life like a worldling, he swallowed it like a philosopher. His nose was of the penetrating order, and seemed to have jutted prematurely from his forehead, which was broad and thoughtful.

His under-lip twitched a little at the close of Sir Sidney's remarks. "We will call this a friendly chat," he said quietly.

"Eh?" said the Baronet, with a radiant air, "not professional? Well, after all, it is not a legal matter. But you are quite sure? Still, between such old friends any question of business and that sort of thing is unpleasant. Conversation becomes restrained at once." He chose a chair, and sat in statuesque ease.

"You know what women are," he said.

Waddilove closed his eyes as

though he would exclude a painful vision.

“You know what my wife is,” continued Sir Sidney.

The lawyer looked grave, in the formal manner appropriate to the discussion of family skeletons—a manner not so much indicative of pity, which might verge too much on the familiar, as of concern—disinterested, brain-felt concern.

“I have nothing to say against Lady Warcop,” said her husband. “She has many excellent qualities, but on the subject of Teresa she is a—what-do-you-call-’em?”

“An enigma,” suggested Waddilove, but in a voice so modulated that had the word been unwelcome it might have passed for a cough.

“That is the thing,” said Sir Sidney, “an enigma. And to turn against her own daughter, her only child! She has not seen her since

she was born ; there has always been some excuse. But now she has suddenly sent for her, and God knows why, for no sooner had she written the letter than she declared she would not have her in the house. Damn it all ! it is *my* house and *my* daughter ! When a man cannot have his own way in his own house, then—then it comes to this—somebody must give in. If I say, ‘ Blanche, I am going to put my foot down,’ she begins to cry. She says, too, that her hair is turning grey with silent worry. And you know, Waddilove, she is never silent, and she is no longer so young that a grey hair or two seems extraordinary. But there are quarrels between us from morning till night, and I cannot allow it. Life is not worth living. Why did she send for the girl if she did not want her ? Where’s the consistency ? As I told

Blanche this morning—‘Blanche,’ I said, as kindly as possible—I did not want a scene, as you may imagine—‘Blanche,’ I said, ‘if you will tell me why you sent for Teresa, in the first place’—But, God bless your soul! before the words were out of my mouth she flew at me like a tigress. And what do you think she said? ‘What! do you begrudge your own child her rightful home? I suppose you do not wish to be reminded of the past. For it was all your fault, although I have had all the blame.’ Imagine her referring to dead and gone matters in that offensive manner! And she was the one who had been abusing the poor child—not I. I ask you what could any man do with a woman like that?”

“It is a very difficult question,” said Waddilove.

“And there is nothing to be gained

by a separation," said Sir Sidney, "because she is so unreasonable, and can neither make head nor tail of the law. There is no peace for me this side of the grave."

"What does Lady Warcop suggest?" said Waddilove. "What are her wishes in the matter?"

"God knows!" said Sir Sidney. "If I knew what she wanted we might come to some understanding. But one moment she says one thing and the next another. My health will not bear it much longer. What do you advise me to do in the meantime?"

"You must be firm," said Waddilove.

"Impossible ; quite impossible. Whenever I speak firmly she begins to cry. You see, she is a gentle, sweet-tempered sort of woman by nature. One does not like to be brutal."

“Have you tried persuasion?”

“I have tried everything—coaxing, threatening, commanding, and exhorting; jokes, presents, theatres, and sermons; reading, singing, playing, and, so far as that goes, praying. No husband could do more to make his wife happy—unless, indeed, he blew his brains out!”

“I am afraid,” said Waddilove, “you must make up your mind to endure these annoyances.”

Sir Sidney sighed heavily and rose from his chair. “Before I married her,” he said, “she was as mild as an angel. She was a little contrary now and again, but one kind word, and she would do anything. Douglas Cockburn never understood that, and tried bullying. Now I see, however, that there were faults on both sides. Of course, I would not say as much to any one

else. This is a judgment on me, Waddilove, and if I did not know it was a judgment I could not bear it another day. As it is, I will face it out to the bitter end. Good-bye."

He left the office with the uneasy idea that he had been talking too freely, and, as a consequence, he began to hate Waddilove as a prying, impertinent fellow—a fellow to be avoided. What right had he to ask so many questions? But it had been a relief to speak out: to utter his feelings; to rid himself even by a straw's weight of that load of sorrow, disappointment, dissatisfaction, and weariness, the bearing of which, after all, proved that his poor fragment of a soul had still its use in the scheme of salvation.

IV.

LADY WARCOP, meanwhile, was pacing the floor of her boudoir. In

her hand she held the photograph of a singularly plain little girl, who stood in a cork grotto staring at a stuffed dog. This portrait of Teresa had been taken some ten years before, and Blanche had lacked the courage to send for another. And now, without warning, to be obliged to present *this* to the world! It was too hard, too bitter, too outrageous. Was ever woman called upon to suffer such mortification? As for motherly feelings, what were they? How could she love a creature she had never seen? Some one had once shown her an infant, but she had felt too ill to notice the piteous object. She did not even understand that it was her own. There was so much cant and nonsense talked about maternal instinct. A cab drove up to the door; with a cry, her Ladyship rushed to the window. Thank goodness, it

was only Sidney. What suffering! What suspense! One more day like this, and she would be on her death-bed.

“Ah! so you have come at last, Sidney?” Where had he been all the morning? She made few demands on his time, but she certainly thought that in common decency and merely for the sake of appearances he would have remained with her to receive poor darling Teresa. It was true that she had not yet arrived, but this did not alter the fact that he *might* have missed her. Poor child! a stranger in her own father’s house! But the world was a cruel place, and she, for her part, was sick and tired of it. If it were not for Teresa, who needed a mother’s care, she was by no means sure that she might not seek a speedy way out of it. Suicide, of course, was wicked,

but God was never hard on women. He understood them : men did not. . . . Was that the bell ?

“Go and meet her,” said Blanche. “Try and look affectionate. I want the poor little thing to think we are glad to see her. As for me, I feel too ill and extraordinary to move.”

As she spoke, however, the door was opened, and two nuns, followed by a young girl, were ushered in. Her Ladyship flushed and paled, and, without speaking, with tears raining down her cheeks, took the girl in her arms, tenderly, closely, as only a mother can.

Sir Sidney rubbed his eyes, almost fearing to rest them on a scene so beautiful, so new in his experience. Blanche seemed to him transfigured, and he saw in that brief moment the woman she might have been : all the fair ambitions she had for-

gotten, all the good impulses she had not obeyed flashed their pure light on her countenance.

Like some guilty creature, he left the room. He was the only sinner there.



CHARACTERS OF THE BOOK.

LORD TWACORBIE.

SIDNEY WICHE, M.P., *Proprietor and Editor of "The Watchman."*

NICHOLAS T. VAN HUYSER, *an American millionaire and poet.*

CAPTAIN SAVILLE ROOKES.

SIR VENTRY COXE, *a widower.*

LADY TWACORBIE, *his sister.*

THE HON. FELICIA GORM, *her step-daughter.*

TERESA WARCOP, *an heiress, cousin to Lady Twacorbie.*

LADY MALLINGER, *a very young widow.*

LUFFY, *the head-gardener.*

SPALDING, *the butler.*

MRS. DANBY *the housekeeper.*

THE scene is laid at Arden Lodge, the country seat of Lord Twacorbie, in Mertonshire. The action takes place in the course of twenty-four hours.

"One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."



A BUNDLE OF LIFE.

I.

THE dining-room in Arden Lodge was superbly furnished with a silver chandelier. This splendid object was of such incomparable interest that Lord Twacorbie, who was a man of taste no less than an economist, had the walls which formed its background, bare, the floor beneath covered with a plain drugget, and the tables and chairs in the apartment of the simplest design. On the same artistic principle, he gave large dinners,

at which the rarest, indeed, unheard-of delicacies, (which were as disagreeable to the palate as they were interesting to the explorer and antiquarian), formed the brief but sufficient menu.

On a certain evening in the early spring of 189-, one of these dinners had taken place with unusual success, possibly because most of the thirty guests were persons of importance, probably because some roast mutton had, by a new cook's judicious mistake, formed a vulgar but stimulating addition to the choice viands of the banquet. The ladies had left the table, and the fifteen men who remained sighed, some with relief, some with regret, some from the force of example, and some because they could dine no more that day.

Lord Twacorbie was a gentleman whom food did not nourish, and

whose airy shapelessness made him seem in some way symbolic of the universe when it was without form, and void. To-night he fluttered a smile like the sun's on a March morning, and surveyed the company with the feverish gaiety of one who is too seriously bored to risk showing languor. He was of all men the last to entertain a table, yet few attempted the task so often, and no one could have been more ignorant of his failures. He started a conversation on the Early Marriages Bill, and quoted, with inspired inaccuracy, a speech recently made on that subject by his friend, Sidney Wiche. Wiche, who happened to be present, endured his host's recital with the air of one accustomed to suffering; at its close his countenance had something humorous, pathetic, and sublime—St. Lawrence on the gridiron saying,

“Turn me! This side is done!” must have looked just so. The editor of *The Watchman* was a man of slender frame and with fewer inches than the ordinary; a small mortal whose boundless spirit—imprisoned yet not impatient for release—gazed through his eyes. His pale face, dull brown hair and duller beard, and the absence in his manner of all that marks the creature of many fashions and one epoch, had made him more famous for his insignificance than any of his contemporaries for their distinction. He was about seven-and-thirty, and hard work had made him look much older.

Two men who sat at the far end of the table seized the advantage of their position, and, talking in undertones, studied him with lively interest.

“Of course, he is clever,” said

the elder of the two ; “ or, at least, he is a great man for the mob. There is a distinction between greatness and being great in the eyes of *a certain class.*” The speaker, Sir Ventry Coxe, had the so-called aristocratic air sometimes found in men of middle-class extraction, but unknown amongst the old nobility. Very young girls, sentimental women, and men of his own stamp, thought him extremely handsome : his features were bold and well-defined, his dark eyes could express any drawing-room emotion with really excellent effect ; his thin, straight lips suggested his refined tastes to those who understand culture as leanness and vulgarity as curves.

“ What do they think of Wiche in America ? ” continued the Baronet.

“ They wonder that he does not marry, ” replied his companion ;

“there are so many pretty women in England.”

Mr. Nicholas T. Van Huyster was a young man about eight-and-twenty, tall, slight, dark, and clean-shaven. His face was not at first sight sympathetic, but, on the other hand, he did not have the aggressive air of one who is conscious that he must be known to be appreciated.

“Wiche is not popular in society,” said Sir Ventry. “He has no presence, no manners, no small talk.”

“No,” answered the American, “he is not that modern of each May so beloved of dining London.”

“His family is nothing,” said Sir Ventry. “His mother was a person of no education, who lived with an art-critic called Wiche. By the by, can you imagine a more miserable occupation than this scribbling about art? What is Art? Madness

in most cases, and mere frippery in others. And only one man here and there makes it pay. Look at Nature, I say, if you want beautiful pictures. But I was telling you about this fellow. It seems he was christened Sidney Wiche; his mother said that his name was at least Christian if it was not legal! I am thankful to say I never met her. I do not pretend to be a saint, but a woman without a conscience strikes me dumb! I feel that there is nothing more to say!"

"Conscience is the name which the orthodox give to their prejudices," said Van Huyster. "But have you ever heard," he went on, drawing out his pocket-book, "that Wiche's father left a very eccentric will? I received this from New York last night." He handed a newspaper cutting to Sir Ventry, who read the following :—

“Sidney Wiche was to be first a Christian, then a scholar, and in course of time a philosophical politician. He was not to marry, ‘but,’ ran the strange document, ‘should he feel drawn towards the married state let him give the matter his best consideration for a no less term than five years, since marriage is of all subjects the one most darkened by fallacy, falsehood, and false sentiment.’ During this period of prayer and reflection he was to read ‘neither poets nor romancers, but St. Thomas Aquinas, Cardinal Newman, and the great historians, who, between them, would so satisfy his soul, his manliness, and his common-sense that after their company any feminine prattler would seem a plague rather than a treasure.’ He was to shun ‘as he would the devil, learned ladies, ladies with artistic gifts, ladies who talked religion, and ladies who were not

ladies !' In conclusion, he was earnestly exhorted to practice the pious exercise of meditating for two hours daily on his own nothingness !"

“Very interesting,” remarked Sir Ventry ; “but interesting things are never true.”

“And the truth is only convincing when it is told by an experienced liar,” observed Nicholas.

“Old Wiche has been dead for some time,” said Sir Ventry, “and I never heard that he left Sidney either means of support or instructions ; it ought to be made known if he did. One likes to hear that a man has behaved like a gentleman in such matters. Unfortunately, he died abroad, and his affairs were managed by these Italian scoundrels. One can get nothing out of them. I must say I like English straightforwardness.”

“*The Watchman* must bring in a large income,” said Van Huyster.

“Undoubtedly,” replied Sir Ventry. “But what a rag the paper is! These Radicals are ruining the nation.”

“I thought Wiche was a member of your own party.”

“My own party,” said Sir Ventry, “is not necessarily my own politics! As a man,” he went on, after a pause, “I like the fellow well enough, and now that he has pushed his way into the world we all try to forget his origin. But with every desire to be fair, I cannot bring myself to regard him as a suitable match for any relative of my own. It is only too well-known that he admires my sister’s step-daughter, Miss Gorm.”

“That does not surprise me,” said Van Huyster, fetching a deep sigh, “she is lovely. Her face is

so bright yet so delicate—a star wrapped in gauze ! ”

Sir Ventry dropped his lower jaw, but recovered it on remembering that the millionaire wrote poetry, very bad poetry, too. “ Felicia is certainly good-looking,” he said ; “ perhaps you are aware that her mother, the former Lady Twacorbie, was an American. She made Twacorbie an excellent wife, however, greatly improved the estate and was very much liked by the Royalities. She died young.”

“ Good wives so often do,” murmured Van Huyster, “ perhaps that is one of their brightest virtues.”

Sir Ventry abhorred anything in the nature of satire—it seemed to him a convenient name for offensive and unmistakable allusions to his own character and career. On this occasion he wondered whether Van Huyster was aware that he, too,

Sir Ventry Coxe, had in his day buried some sixty-three inches of weary perfection. He decided to ignore the remark.

“One can see,” he said, “that Felicia is extremely un-English: her manners are a little crude. But I like a woman who can talk: a man wants to be amused, he does not want to wear his brains out amusing a wife!”

At this point Lord Twacorbie rose up from the table.

The pantry was immediately behind the dining-room—and here, at the close of the dinner, Spalding, the butler, the head-gardener, Luffy, and Mrs. Danby, the housekeeper, were engaged in conversation of an even more instructive nature than that indulged in by Lord Twacorbie and his distinguished company.

“Who came down from town this evening?” asked Luffy.

“Sir Ventry, Mr. Wiche, Captain Rookes, and this new American, Mr. Van Huyster,” said the housekeeper.

“And who are the women?” continued Luffy.

“Miss Warcop for one,” said Mrs. Danby. “Between ourselves her ladyship is on the matchmaking hop again. But there—when did she ever pull anything off what you may call satisfactory? She’s too hopeful. And say what you like, Luffy, it doesn’t do to be hopeful in this world. Expect nothing, I say!” The widow shook her head, and heaved her breast, and hurled a poignant glance at Spalding, who had been shuddering on the brink of matrimony for twelve and a half years.

“It might be a very good thing for Sir Ventry if Miss Warcop would

have him," said Spalding; "but the question arises in my mind, will she? If she would take my advice she would stay single!"

"Everybody is not so wrapt up in themselves as you are," said Mrs. Danby, tartly.

"If I was a woman," murmured Spalding, in a weak voice, "the man doesn't live that I would sacrifice my peace of mind for. Men are not worth so much thought. The devotion of women is something awful to think of."

"It is," sighed Luffy, whose wife had a jealous temperament, "it is."

"I can say this much," said Mrs. Danby: "when Miss Warcop marries she will not choose a conceited, self-seeking, cold-hearted, unfeeling *half-a-man* like Sir Ventry! I would not look at him—no, not if he draped me in diamonds from head to foot! Mr. Wiche is the man for her."

“Not he,” said Spalding, “he’s got his eye on Lady Mallinger.”

“If he was to roll his eyes at Lady Mallinger from now till Doomsday,” said Mrs. Danby, “I should still say that he and Miss Warcop were made for each other. And, what is more, they will marry. Whoever lives longest will see the most. I know what I know. If God Almighty intends a couple to marry that marriage will come off. The man can’t help himself. Just you bear that in mind !”

She left them, and neither of the men had the courage to smile. They talked instead of the new Cemetery, and grew cheerful on the subject of coffins.





II.

ARDEN LODGE in Mertfordshire is a large, white building surrounded by beautiful grounds, and facing the finest scenery in the county. This is saying a great deal, for although Mertford is flat and not at all wild or what is called romantic, its rivers and fields, gardens and woods, toy-like farms and shady parks are, for their kind, the prettiest in the world. And one can only find such peculiar prettiness in England; it is so well-disposed, calm and unsuggestive—inspiring neither passionate senti-

ments, nor unearthly music, nor flaming words, but what, in some opinions, may be better than all these—a dreamless, ineffable drowsiness.

On the morning after the dinner-party, a lady and gentleman were strolling on the Terrace which led by wide steps on to the lawn of Lord Twacorbie's residence. The lady was Miss Warcop : her escort was Sidney Wiche.

Teresa was no longer in her first youth, and she had never been pretty : her oval face was colorless, heavy black eyebrows overhung her hazel eyes ; mouth, nose, and chin were too obviously mouth, nose, and chin. She was remarkable, however, and only needed a reputation for wickedness to make her considered curiously fascinating.

As these two came down the steps, they were commenting on the

weather, the unusual warmth, seeing it was but Easter, and the freshness of the air. When they reached the lawn, they walked in silence to a seat, sat down and stared at the landscape. They were evidently old friends.

“Well,” said Wiche, at last, “is the most practical woman in the world, dreaming?”

“I was thinking of you,” she answered, looking at him with such frank, unclouded affection that he blushed to think how little he deserved it. He might have made some answer, but as she spoke they both heard the rustle of silk skirts: the sound grew nearer: at last a lady, charmingly attired in a gown which suggested gray vapor and sunlight, approached them. She presented a strange effect of brilliance, fragility, and mistiness: her features were soft, and her head in

profile seemed rather a shadow in the air than something real or human. But the shadow was plainly womanish—one could never have mistaken it for an angel's. Her skin was fair, her hair light brown, her eyes blue, sapphirine, deep, a little troubled : she gazed at Wiche, he gazed at her ; Teresa watched the meeting with some uneasiness.

“I did not know that the glare was so great,” she said, faintly ; “I should have brought my parasol.”

“Let me fetch it !” said Wiche.

She thanked him as, with an admirable semblance of good humor, he left them.

“You met Mr. Wiche some years ago, did you not ?” Teresa asked, turning to Lady Mallinger : “did you know him at all well ?”

“That would depend on what you call *well*,” said the younger

woman. Her voice was strangely melodious : to hear it was to think of the fabulous singing of fabulous sirens. If she babbled of brick-dust, one thought only of lute-strings. For this reason she was never quoted accurately.

“I mean,” said Teresa, “were you great friends?”

“I should not say that.”

“I thought I saw him looking at you rather often during dinner last evening.”

“Did he?” said Lady Mallinger. “I hope my hair was dressed properly. My maid is in love just at present, and she makes me quite frightful. It is not that she is malicious, but Love is so distracting.” Smiling sweetly, she looked first at the trees, then at the grass, and finally at Teresa. “In some ways,” she went on, “I am rather sorry to renew Mr. Wiche’s acquaintance :

we have nothing in common—absolutely nothing. He has the instincts of a Turk : he does not believe in a woman's intellect. Sometimes I wish I really was stupid and lived in a harem !”

“ My dear ! ” said Teresa.

“ I do, indeed : women were not made to struggle and strive. They ought only to be fed and clothed and petted. But I thought otherwise once. Before my marriage I was anxious to work out a career : I wanted to be artistic : I thought I might become a famous actress. Ah, to think of those days when I was hoping and dreaming, when my thoughts were my achievements, when the future seemed so far and the present so eternal ! ” Her voice trembled, she flushed and then grew pale : one could imagine that she was struggling in a very hurricane of lost possibilities. “ But when

work began in earnest," she continued, "when art became a task, and dreaming, waste of time, I confess I grew sick of ambition. I only wanted to sit idle in the marketplace. And so I married, and danced, and dressed, and chattered: I gave up thinking—it made me too miserable." Teresa had an extraordinary power of winning confidences: perhaps because she rarely talked.

"A woman's mission is to play the fool," continued Lady Malinger, "and that is why she can only lead a man so long as she does not love him. On the instant she loves, she must be honest or die: she loses all discretion: she quarrels when she should cajole, smiles when she should frown, utters ugly truth when she should tell pretty lies: she cannot flatter, she cannot pretend—in fact, she can do nothing

but love—and that beyond sense.” Commanding was not the word for Lady Mallinger’s manner: yet there was that in her air which insisted, which brooked no denial, which said plainly enough: “What I think must be, because I was not born to be disappointed!”

“I do not agree with you,” said Teresa, “because if I loved a man I would have no desire to lead him. I could only pray that I might not prove his stumbling-block, and that we might help each other to do right rightly. Life is so hard to live alone.”

“Oh, if I only dared to be natural,” exclaimed Lady Mallinger; “if I only dared to tell all I think, and feel, and know. If I could only drop this tedious gossiping and grinning! I am not tired of living, but I am tired of my body—of this mummy-case. When I was a child,

I felt old ; now I am a woman, I feel young. I want to go back to the youth of the world : I want the time when love was the only happiness, and folly the highest wisdom ! ”

“ Did you ever talk like this to Mr. Wiche ? ” said Teresa.

“ Of course not, ” said Lady Malinger. “ I only talk nonsense to men ! ”

“ Dear me ! Yet I daresay they like it. But I promised to show Mr. Wiche the primrose path. As you do not care for him, I will meet him half-way. See ! he is coming now. ” She rose from her seat and hastened across the lawn in the direction of the house. Lady Malinger sat smiling to herself : she had never suffered from jealousy, and she thought it the drollest of passions. She was on the verge of laughter when Captain Rookes ap-

peared on the Terrace. He was undeniably handsome : his features had that harmonious irregularity which is so much more like truth than beauty, so much more life-like, sinner-like, and love-like than perfection. His eyes flashed fire and sentiment—youth lacking either is dull—melancholy had added a force to their magic.

“Are you sure,” he said anxiously, as he approached Lady Malinger, “are you sure that it is discreet to meet here where every one can see us?”

“Of course,” said her ladyship, whose whole bearing and manner changed, and who now assumed an infantile, prattling, and pouting simplicity ; “of course, I hate out-of-the-way corners.”

“Speak a little lower, darling,” said Saville, “there may be some gardeners about.”

“That would not matter.”

“Not matter? My dear Lilian, you do not know the world. If the world knew how much we loved each other, it would grow suspicious.”

“Why? Numbers of people love each other.”

“Yes,” said the Captain, “but we are not like other people. I love you too well to ask you to marry me and so drag you down to a miserable shabby-genteel existence.”

“I do not mind being poor, Saville,” said Lady Mallinger, eagerly. “Before my marriage, Papa only allowed me sixty pounds a year for my clothes, and every one said how well I managed. That, I know, was as a girl, and, of course, a married woman has to dress more—in a sense—but a handsome mantle goes a long way. Lady Twacorbie has worn that

satin and lace thing at least four seasons : she has had the sleeves altered, and it has been re-lined with a different color, but it is the same cloak ! And I am tired of marrying for money : it is not as though I had not tried it. No one can say that I gave the least trouble when they married me to Charles—although I never did admire red hair, and he was the worst dancer in his regiment. I know he was most civil to poor Papa, but after all he was not so rich as they thought him, and it would have been wiser, perhaps, if I had remained single a little longer. But *you*, Saville, I could be poor with you : you are so sympathetic, and you wrote me such a beautiful letter when Charles died. I am sure, too, that he would have been pleased with that lovely wreath ! And—and I cannot forget the old days

when we made toffee together in the schoolroom at home. Do you remember ? ”

Saville tried to look as though the toffee episode had for him thoughts too deep for utterance. He flung cautious glances about the scene and then hastily pressed her hand.

“How can you ask ? ” he said : “But believe me, dearest Lilian, our only duty is renunciation. I mean, we must forget our love, and if we can, each other. I have been waiting months to find words for all this : it seemed unutterable. Truth is difficult, and the less one speaks it the harder it grows. I have lied when I pretended to be happy. I find it easier after all to admit that I am in despair. Yet not despair—because I feel that honor is still dearer to me than your society. The thought is hackneyed, but so are the commandments. Some day

you will meet some excellent, well-meaning man who will have a fortune worth offering you. Perhaps he will not be much to look at and he may not be polished in his manners. I daresay, too, that he will often say and do much which will jar on your refined taste. But polish is not everything !”

“I cannot live,” cried Lady Malinger, “in an unpolished atmosphere !”

“You see, my darling, we all have to endure disagreeable things in this life ; money and love never seem to go together.”

“We should have fifteen hundred a year,” whimpered Lilian.

“What is that, my dear child ?” said Saville. “Two thousand is the lowest income I can conceive myself marrying on. As I have said, if I cared for you in the ordinary, vulgar way, I might risk

everything and urge you to ruin my whole life—and perhaps your own as well. So, darling, is it fair to tempt me?”

“I do not want to tempt you,” said Lady Mallinger. “I only want to talk sensibly. Please, please, dear Saville, do not say that I am tempting you. I would not be so wicked, for I am sure you only want to do right, and men know much more about honor and incomes and things like that than women do!”

Sweet, submissive, believing, unassertive Lilian, of a type all but extinct! Where would he find such another? He rose from his seat in agitation, feeling, for the moment, that he might in an emergency show the splendid indiscretion of a hero. But the mood passed, and with it a great deal of Lady Mallinger's folly. Something else, in-

definable, chilling, deadly, took its place in her soul. She, too, stood up, and in silence they surveyed a far-distant and sleeping cow.

“You see, Lilian,” Saville stammered at last.

“I see it all clearly,” she replied. “I only wonder why I did not see it before. It would be the greatest mistake in the world for us to marry!”

This remark cut him to the heart: he flushed, his whole aspect suffered.

“No woman,” he said, “could say such a thing to a man she loved. You cannot care for me.”

“I do indeed care for you, Saville,” she said, “please believe me.”

Rookes, happily, did not need much persuasion to convince him. “This world is a beastly place,” he burst forth. “It has everything to

make one happy except happiness. Look at us! We are young, we love each other, we have the same tastes, and we are in the same set. How we could enjoy life! But we cannot afford it."

"It is hard," said Lilian, "terribly hard. I daresay, though, that is all for the best."

"I must go away," said Saville: "I see too much of you; it is too tantalizing! But hush! here comes Felicia."

"How well you know her step!" exclaimed Lilian.





III.

FELICIA GORM was a young girl about seventeen, with large blue eyes, small regular features, and rosy cheeks ; to-day she was even rosier than usual.

“Mamma would be so grateful if you would talk to Mr. Van Huyster,” she said to Saville ; “he is asking so many questions about England, and no one can answer him.”

When Rookes had left them, Felicia tried to look disinterested. “Have you ever noticed,” she said, “how easily he blushes. . . . It

does not mean anything—although Mama says that men only blush nowadays to be mistaken for Christians! I am sure that is not the case with Captain Rookes. . . . Do you like him?”

“We are half-cousins!”

The young girl sat down by her side. “Dear Lady Mallinger,” she said, “I am dreadfully unhappy. But I am so fond of you; I am sure you will help me.”

“Indeed, I will. What is troubling you?”

“Where shall I begin? Mama sent for me this morning. I felt it was to be a serious conversation because she wore her coronet brooch. She told me that if Mr. Wiche asked me to marry him, I was to say yes. Think of it! It seems they have arranged it all between them; they think he is growing too democratic, and now

he has refused a Baronetcy he has become more popular than ever. They say it would be such an excellent thing if he married a Peer's daughter, and Mama says I must sacrifice myself for the sake of the country. I am sure that marriage into *our* family will not change his opinion of the House of Lords! I have no influence with him, but Mama says I must try to have one; that he must be very fond of me or he would not stay here. Every one knows that he detests visiting as a rule. I believe he is in love with *you*, but Mama says that is an absurd idea, because he knew you before you married Lord Mallinger, and he is not the kind of man who would fancy your style of beauty in a wife. He is always staring at you at any rate. Then I said he seemed great friends with Teresa; but then, as Mama says,

dear Teresa is almost ugly, and if he had intended to marry her for her money, he would have done so long ago ! So I suppose I must be the one after all, and in the end I shall have to accept him. But—but I shall always love Saville best ! ”

“ Saville ? ” exclaimed Lady Mallinger, in astonishment. “ Saville ? ”

“ If you knew him as I do, you would not wonder that I love him,” said Felicia, blushing deeply, “ he is so chivalrous, so noble, so unselfish, just like King Arthur in Lord Tennyson. And to hear him speak of women ! He thinks we are all angels. “ I am so afraid, dear Lady Mallinger, lest he may be disappointed in us, because we are not all angels, are we ? ”

Lady Mallinger all this time had kept her eyes on the ground, and,

but for her gentle breathing, betrayed no signs of animation. At the girl's question, however, she stirred.

“Has Saville told you—has he said—has he spoken——?”

“He knows that I love him,” said Felicia, faintly.

“But has he asked you to be his wife?”

“Not in so many words, but words are not everything. He is not rich; he is afraid people might say—you know what they always say. Once he told me he wished I had no money—that I was poor and unknown. Oh, I understand him so well.”

“I am sure your family would not care for the match,” said Lilian, at last; “and evidently they have set their hearts on Wiche. Wiche is rather odd, but I was only thinking last night what a fine face he

has : he would make you a kind husband, and you would be quite contented—after a little.” The foolishness of mortals may often be startled into a certain sagacity ; and Felicia’s innocence had the effect of rousing Lady Mallinger’s common-sense which, though undisciplined and kitten-like, was still promising.

“No doubt,” she continued, looking gravely at the girl’s anxious face, “Saville is most agreeable, and it is very pleasing to think that such a handsome, popular fellow is in love with one. But would you feel so flattered if he were plain : if you heard, for instance, that he was fickle, mercenary, and treacherous !”

“But I might hear that of Wiche, too,” said Felicia. “You see, dear Lady Mallinger, I must believe in *some* man or I could not marry at

all ! And I would rather be deceived by Saville than adored by Sidney Wiche ! ”

“That is absurd. I should be very wrong to encourage you in such ideas. When you are older you will see how foolish it is to indulge in these fancies ! ”

“I am afraid you do not like Saville,” said Felicia, suddenly.

“My dear little girl,” said Lilian, with great dignity, “it is only because I am Saville’s friend that I understand your point of view ! ”

“Then why are you so angry with me for loving him ? I am sure you would not care for any one who was not noble and generous—you would not be his friend if he did not have fine qualities ! ”

Conversation between a disillusioned devotee and an enthusiastic novice is always difficult : the disillusioned fears to be candid, and the

enthusiast fears nothing ; one has not learnt enough, the other has all to learn. This, then, was the situation of Lady Mallinger and Felicia. To one, Saville seemed a traitor ; to the other, he was a being with neither body, soul, nor passions—a portable ideal who, at his sublimest, murmured, “I love you !” Rookes was, as a matter of fact, a mortal whose good intentions and generous admiration for the admirable were not steady enough to carry the load of a fashionable education, nor robust enough to endure the nipping cruelty of society small talk. He feared his better instincts as the pious do their besetting sins, and when he was surprised into one of his natural virtues, his first precaution was to make it appear a polite vice.

“I will not say one word against Saville,” said Lady Mallinger, at

last. "I would rather not discuss him. In any case I can only implore you to obey your relatives : after all they must know best."

"Then," said Felicia, "it would be useless to ask you to help me."

"What can I do?" asked Lady Mallinger ; "what is there that I could do?"

"Well," said Felicia, "you see I am not yet engaged to Mr. Wiche. If he could only be made *not* to propose, everything would come right. Dear Lady Mallinger, if you would only distract his attention : you are so much prettier than I am, and I am sure he would be far more influenced by you than he ever could be by me. Oh, please promise me that you will try."

This suggestion was not without its charm. Lilian had a certain liking for Wiche : he appealed to her head rather than to her imagination,

to her sympathies rather than to her senses: and, though he did not inspire her with poetic thoughts, he made the prose of her existence seem less like prose.

“Perhaps there would be no harm,” she said, “and yet——”

“Oh, do promise,” said Felicia, “my life and soul are bound up in it.”

“One can tie a great many knots in one’s life and soul,” said Lady Mallinger.

“But love is so mysterious—so wonderful. It is the music of the world.”

“It is a pity that it goes so often out of tune!” said Lilian. “Oh,” she added suddenly, “our life is on so small a scale: everything seems so pretty! Are women only born to fall in love with men like Saville Rookes? Why do we do these things?”

“Because there is nothing else for us to do, I suppose,” said Felicia.

“But think of all these clever women who paint pictures, and make speeches, and write for the papers, and sing, and act, and play. Ah, how grand it must be to have something serious to think of!”

“I believe they get very tired of it,” said Felicia. “I am sure they are not half so happy as we are.”

“Are we happy?” said Lilian.

“Of course we are,” replied the young girl. “What a strange question!”

“Perhaps it is strange. I feel tired.”

“And you look pale,” said Felicia. “Let me fetch you my scent-bottle.” She ran lightly across the lawn and up the Terrace steps without perceiving Saville who was returning from another direction.

He came close to Lady Mallinger and looked into her face.

“You do not look well,” he said.

“I am well enough.”

“Did that poor little thing bore you?”

“Not at all.”

“Why are you so curt?”

“Am I?”

“Have I offended you?”

“Oh, no,” said Lady Mallinger.

“But you know quite well what Felicia has been talking about. You have acted abominably.”

“What have I done?” asked Rookes. “Is it a crime to pay a few silly compliments to a child? She is hardly more. You are surely not jealous? You know you are the only woman I really care for. A man may love various women for various reasons at all times of his life, but he can only love once, one way. Each experience is to-

tally different, and absolutely new ; only one, however, can be quite satisfactory. Now to love you is my second nature ; it is part of my constitution. If you do not trust me, why did you encourage me ? ”

“ Why ? ” said Lady Mallinger, with flashing eyes. “ Why ? Do you ask me why ? I will not lie to you. I loved you because I thought you loved me—because I felt that you would help me, *you*, who were so much stronger, so much nobler, so much braver than I. When you said . . . when you seemed to think I had some beauty, I longed to be the most beautiful of all women, that you might be proud of me : I longed to be royal that I might throw aside my royalty and show the world that I would rather be ruled by you than rule a kingdom : I wanted a palace that I might leave it and follow you into darkness and

poverty : I wished that we lived in times of danger that I might save you from death, that I might lie for you, hate for you, steal for you, die for you ! How I have loved you ! how have you deceived me ! I have nothing left but contempt for both of us. . . . Stay there !”

She walked away alone, and as he felt too ashamed to follow her footsteps, he chose another path, and was therefore late for luncheon. A fact which showed the injured woman that her words had played some havoc with his conscience.





IV.

SIR VENTRY had been trying since noon to exchange a few words of immense importance with his sister. At last, in the drawing-room after luncheon, he found the moment. Teresa was playing the piano : Van Huyster and Felicia were within sight on the lawn. Lady Mallinger was cooing to some love-birds in a gilt cage which hung near the window. Lady Twacorbie sat at a little distance from the others, embroidering an altar-cloth. She was a being-about five-and-thirty, dressed with

elegance, but with no attempt at individuality. No doubt eleven out of every dozen women in her own station were wearing gowns of the same hue, make, and texture. Her hair was flaxen and arranged in the artificial, half-grotesque style commanded by Court hair-dressers : at a first glance she looked like a wax doll—the unchanging expression, the neat, set features, the unseeing eyes, had not the divine impress. Yet she lived and was a woman : without her false curls, her whale-bones, and her stare, she was even beautiful : in unguarded moments, she was witty. She was not accomplished, however, and had no force of will : the winds of opinion blew her feather-like round the four corners of her boudoir. But in her way she was perfectly happy : she sighed for no new experiences and wept over no old ones : life pre-

sented no enigmas, and, feeling neither sorrow nor wonder, she had no need of philosophy. She read nothing, but was extraordinarily observant, and had a most tenacious memory for little things. For instance, she could quote whole conversations, and describe to a half-turn just how this one entered a room, that one shook hands, and the other sat down : she delighted afternoon callers by remembering how each liked his or her tea—A. never took sugar, B. liked three large lumps or four small ones, C. only drank hot water, D. could not bear the sight of cream, and so on. This was the lighter side of her character : she had a certain amount of sentiment, and would have made a devoted wife and mother of the primitive type. But the creatures of her world were bored by devotion, so she flirted in

the most religious manner possible, and had an Infants' Bible-Class.

“My dear Charlotte,” said Sir Ventry, “has it never occurred to you that Van Huyster is deeply interested in Felicia? I have observed it for days.”

“You are always making unnecessary discoveries,” replied his sister. “You know my plans with regard to Felicia. Wiche will certainly speak to her either to-day or to-morrow.”

“Van Huyster is a far more desirable match; he is not only richer, but more tractable,” said Sir Ventry. “If he were to speak first——”

“As you say,” murmured her ladyship, “he is enormously rich.”

“Precisely: that is my point. And he goes everywhere.”

“But then Wiche is such a power in politics,” said Lady Twacorbie;

“ think what good we could do by our influence over him ! ”

“ The country would be far more grateful,” said Sir Ventry, “ if we helped Van Huyster to spend his money in a gentlemanly manner. However, it is your affair not mine. I have made a suggestion : act on it or not, as you please,” and he strutted magnificently from her presence.

For some moments Lady Twacorbie did not ply her needle, but unpicked the stitches she had taken during the preceding conversation. At last she called Lilian. “ Come and talk to me, my dear,” she said ; “ I have not had a word with you since breakfast. You see I drove Harold to the station”—(Lord Twacorbie had gone to town for a few days)—“ He was so sorry to leave us.” She glanced at Van Huyster and Felicia who passed the

window. "We are so anxious about Felicia," she said; "young girls are so flighty—is it reasonable to suppose that they are competent to select the right sort of man? Ah, if women would only choose their husbands as carefully as they do their bonnets, how much brighter life would be!"

"But, my dear Lady Twacorbie, what would you call the right sort of husband?"

"A man," she replied, "with means, position, a good digestion, and sound principles: such a person, for instance, as this excellent, kind-hearted, and deserving Van Huyster!"

"Van Huyster!" said Lady Malinger, in surprise.

"Yes. Have you observed how extremely attentive he is to Felicia?"

"Perhaps I have, now you speak

of it," said Lilian, "but I thought Mr. Wiche——"

"Ah!" said Lady Twacorbie, "Mr. Wiche is all very well in his proper place. I have the greatest respect for his undeniable merits. I hope, however—I earnestly hope that he will not do anything rash. In fact, I may as well confess that I am in a difficulty. As Harold was obliged to go to town to-day, and as Ventry is not well, I asked Mr. Wiche if he would escort Felicia and myself to the Bishop's Bazaar this afternoon. I see now that it might cause gossip in the neighborhood: people make such absurd remarks. Besides, I fear it is scarcely kind to throw the poor man so frequently in the dear child's society. Do you think you could keep him amused in some way until we have left the house: we can pretend that there was some blunder and perhaps take

Mr. Van Huyster. . . . These things are difficult to explain."

"I think I understand," said Lady Mallinger: "of course, I will do anything to make myself useful. But I must at least change my gown: I heard him say that he liked my blue muslin!" She went out laughing so gaily, that Teresa, who was playing mournful music, left the piano and came down to her cousin.

"What is the joke?" she asked.

Lady Twacorbie did not hesitate over her reply. She had made up her mind that Teresa was dying of love for the elegant Ventry and would therefore have no interest in the matrimonial schemes with regard to Sidney Wiche.

"Ventry has convinced me with regard to Van Huyster and Felicia," she said, at once. "Obstinacy is not one of my faults, and I am

never deaf to reason. I have arranged everything in the most charming way : Lilian has agreed to distract Mr. Wiche's attention. Of course, dear, I would have asked you, but you are much too clever ! One can only trust a fool to carry out a plot of this kind with success. She is such a simpleton—just the silly creature to hoodwink a man of genius ! ”

“ Oh, this is too much ! ” said Teresa. “ I assure you a more accomplished actress never lived. She is far cleverer than either of us. ”

“ Absurd ! Impossible ! ” said Lady Twacorbie.

“ There is nothing easier than the impossible—for Lady Mallinger. But I am sure that Sidney will see through her nonsense at once ; you must remember that he is my friend and I have known him for years : your plan will not succeed. ”

“ But he admires her extremely,” said Lady Twacorbie.

“ Has he ever told you so ? ”

“ Of course not : it is because he has never said so, that I am certain of it. Men are dreadfully discreet, my dear Teresa. I only believe in what they do *not* say. But come, we must leave the coast clear, come ! ”

Teresa followed her slowly.





V.

LADY MALLINGER reëntered the room a few moments later, in all her bravery of blue muslin, ribbons, and lace. She was cooing to the love-birds when Wiche came in. His acquaintance with Lady Mallinger had extended over some four years : from her point of view it might have been called a dinner-party friendship—that is to say, they could discuss people and subjects of the hour with a freedom which passes well enough for intimacy in the vagueness, bustle, and gigantic pettiness of a London season. But to Wiche

their occasional meetings and interchange of ideas had meant much more; the man of letters is not a man of letters if he accepts life and the circumstances of life as they appear at first sight—it is the prime instinct of his nature to reject what *seems* and to clutch—or die in failing to clutch—things not as they are, but as his imagination would have them. To be brief, our friend had fallen in love with the idea of loving Lady Mallinger.

“Do I disturb you?” he said, and took a seat near her. She smiled at him and made a charming grimace at her pets.

“There is a bazaar at the Bishop’s this afternoon,” he continued, “and I believe I was expected to go, but as Van Huyster enjoys these things and I do not, I have asked Lady Twacorbie to take him in my stead. I hope she will not be offended, but

I really wanted to get a quiet hour with you."

Her heart jumped and she studied him with a new interest. There is one glory of the friend, and another glory of the possible lover. For the first time she discovered that he had a certain intensity, a masterful air, a look of determination—all of which she admired.

"We have so few opportunities to speak to each other," he said.

"You have changed since I first knew you," cried Lady Mallinger: "we were such good friends once, and now—when we meet—I hardly know how to describe it—there is a coldness, a restraint. I have feared that you did not like me. But I am saying too much."

"If I told you that there was indeed a reason for my restraint, would you care?"

She put her lips to the cage and

piped, apparently to the birds—
“Tell me the reason!”

“Have you never guessed it?
was I so hard to understand?”

“I could never understand any
man, but then a man never seems
able to explain himself, does he?”

“It may be that he dare not try,”
said Wiche.

“What could he fear?” she
asked; “can it be that men know
how unstable they are? I always
thought they could not, because
they never try to be firmer. And I
love firmness! Now we women
know only too well that we are
very weak, very foolish, very shal-
low, and we wonder what men can
see in us! We must be so tiresome!
such burdens! such unnecessary
evils! such tedious, provoking crea-
tures! Some of us may have some
beauty; yet that soon goes, and
then there is nothing left of us but

a headache ! Oh, do not look surprised : I fear I am growing cynical. I am beginning to agree with many of your views on the soul, and death, and marriage, and things of that order ! ”

“ Ah ! never trust a man’s opinion on any subject until he has been in love,” said Wiche. “ Love is the only thing which can make life as clear as noon-day.”

“ Then I suppose you still find it dark and perplexing ! Dear me ! how idly I talk. I meant to say—but would it be impertinent ? I was only thinking that a day, an hour, perhaps a few words might make all the difference in your ideas ! ”

“ If I told you,” said Wiche, “ that sleeping and waking I heard but one voice, saw but one face.”

“ Does it bore you ? ” she asked ; “ would you rather *not* see it ? ”

“Each day,” he continued, “it grows dearer to me, more beautiful, more—ah! if I waited until I were more eloquent I would never speak, never tell you my one hope, my one aim, my one ambition—above all things, beyond all things, before all things. Just—to gain you; to gain you—just that. I would not own it was impossible, I only saw you, loved you and waited. You passed me by, you hardly knew me. I was only one in a crowded world. A friend? Yes, when you remembered me. Was that often? Sometimes we talked together: once I wrapped you in your opera cloak, have you forgotten? I touched your cheek—it was an accident.”

“As you say,” murmured Lilian, “it only happened once.”

“Another time you leant for a moment on my arm.”

“That was a year ago.”

“In March,” he said, “it was a perfect night.”

“Oh, no! it rained.”

“A perfect night,” he repeated, moving nearer, “and you never guessed how much I loved you—how much you were to me, how much I loved you! How beautiful, how very beautiful——” He kissed her.

Lady Mallinger started away in a sudden panic. “I did not mean to say so much,” she said. “I did not mean—but hark!” She put her finger to her lips and flew across the room into a large chair with wide arms. These concealed her from Teresa Warcop who now entered. She was evidently much agitated in spite of her quiet manner. “I am so glad to find you alone,” she said to Wiche, “because I must speak to you. But first let me say, in justice to myself, that I

am not a mischief-maker. If I ever seem meddlesome it is only because I am so interested in my friends that I cannot remain silent when speech would be of service to them."

"You have too much heart," said Wiche.

"I cannot bear to see a man deceived, trifled with, made a jest for chattering vixens!" said Teresa, passionately.

"The worst of it is that he rarely shows gratitude if one endeavors to enlighten him."

"A thankless task, I know," said Teresa; "but if we only do our duty for the sake of being thanked we are miserable creatures. . . O Sidney! never trust a woman! At least, never trust blue eyes! Oh! when I think of it, I lose all patience, almost all charity. That such a man should be duped by such a

woman! Woman, did I say? No, a mere bundle of fire and frivolity!"

"How much more promising than mere flesh and blood," exclaimed Wiche.

"She made a bargain," said Teresa, "a kind of wager—that she would force you into a flirtation. And she thinks she is succeeding: she even began her machinations at luncheon. I saw it all: her looks, laughs, sighs. Oh, it was insupportable!"

"Are you speaking of poor little Felicia?" said Wiche.

"Felicia?" said Teresa. "Felicia? When I speak of a creature with neither heart, morals, mind, nor beauty—a heap of lies, vanity and affectation—I mean Lady Malinger."

Wiche grew so pale that Teresa—half with jealousy and half with fright—grew even paler. She

held out both her trembling hands and stumbled blindly towards him.

“My heart has been with you,” she stammered. “I feel it all, see it all, know it all.”

What she meant she hardly knew. He neither looked nor uttered a reply; but, brushing past her with a gesture hard to translate, walked to the window. A stillness almost like some grim and living presence filled the room. Teresa remained in her rigid attitude, staring, with despairing tenderness, not at the man, but at the place where he had stood.

“A wager! a bargain!” said Wiche, at last. “I do not understand.”

“Nor did I when I first heard it,” said Teresa. “I could scarcely believe anything so odious, even of her. And I have heard a good

many stories, too! But Charlotte explained the matter only too clearly. *Lilian was to distract you.* That was the expression: her own words." She paused a moment. Wiche never stirred, but kept one unchanging expression, which betrayed nothing save its unchangeableness. "Have I been wrong to tell you?" she went on; "have I been wrong? But friendship, my sense of justice, and you—the noblest man I know, the one above all others I—I respect."

"I do not understand you—or her," said Wiche, at last.

"My dear friend, men only understand the kind of woman who is more masculine than a man! . . . But, Sidney, are you vexed with me? Have I been too zealous? You know, you surely believe I meant no malice? Yet I cannot say that I feel any kindness for

Lady Mallinger ; that would be impossible. I despise her !”

“Is that necessary ?” said Wiche.

“Can I forgive her conduct towards yourself ? Not that she has succeeded in fooling you. But the attempt—I cannot forgive the attempt. What impudence ! what presumption !”

“Ah, there you are unjust ! The feat was well within her power : I was only too willing to be fooled.”

“Willing !” cried Teresa.

“Where is your spirit ? How weak a man is after all ! What a mercy that she cannot hear you : it would make her even vainer than she is by nature.”

“I fear we are growing too old and prosaic,” said Wiche, bitterly ; “no wonder these young people try to rouse us.”

“Sidney ! . . . Do I seem so old ?”

“No one would guess your age,” he said, without looking at her.

“Unfortunately, you know it!” said Teresa. “Would you have forgiven *me*, if I had made such a bargain as this other woman? I think not.”

Wiche did not hear the remark, or if he did, he made no reply.

She swallowed a sob and left the room.





VI.

LADY MALLINGER came forward half-crying, half-defiant.

“I cannot, I will not believe one word Teresa has said!” exclaimed Wiche. “She is the most honest soul in the world, but she makes mistakes.”

“You would be wiser,” said Lilian, slowly, “if you believed her.”

“So you admit it,” he said. “Do you think that Love is a play-thing? a mood for a dull afternoon? a frame of mind to jump in and out of just for amusement? Is it noth-

ing to stake your life on another's, to be faithful when they are faithless, strong when they are weak? Is it so little to love like this? Do you think it is so easy? Do you think it brings much happiness?"

Until that hour, the devotion he had felt for Lady Mallinger was of that unreal kind which is only dangerous so long as its object remains an idea. It was to a great extent theoretic, and based on the dogmas of erotic poetry: in her image he loved a dozen heroines—not one woman. Now that he had kissed her, however, and she had shown herself sufficiently human to rouse his anger, the whole relation changed. He no longer saw her through the mist of sentimental fancy; she was simply a pretty woman who attracted him. He felt vaguely that she might tempt him to say and do much which he

would surely repent of. He repeated again, "Do you think such love brings much happiness?"

"Ah! if you only knew me as I know myself," murmured Lady Mallinger. "All that Teresa said of me was true—and yet, not true enough. Everything about me was falsehood and pretence, until—until you seemed to believe in me. Do you understand? Can you not see? Are you so unforgiving, or—are you only blind? Why are you so silent?"

She held out her hand, which he took half eagerly and half in dread: her lightest touch seemed so much more satisfying than all the wisdom of the ancients.

"If I could only remain silent," said Wiche, passionately; "if I could only keep you—only feel that you were mine—mine—mine at all risks! Yet no—you act too well.

I could never know how much I was mistaken."

"Why should we refuse the happiness this hour gives us, because some other hour might take it away? In the meantime, there can be no better thing than this. No one before has ever cared whether I was in jest or earnest," she faltered; "every other man takes it for granted that I am heartless, brainless, and soulless in any case. When I am serious, they say I am in low spirits; when I am sincere, they praise my hypocrisy. So I take refuge in deceit, and I succeed so well that now I have deceived myself, and I no longer know what I mean, what I want, what I think, or what I am! To judge me fairly, you should have lived my life. My father was not kind; at eighteen I married. The world liked my husband: he ate

too much, drank too much, and made too merry with other people's lives. No one knows what I have suffered. I have only found one thing which outweighs disappointment—bitterness—all—all that is harsh, heavy to bear, and terrible. That moment—that one moment when you trusted me. . . . It was so unexpected. I had always liked you as a friend ; but you seemed so far away, and I thought you could only have contempt for me and my vain, hopeless life. And the end of it all? Do you suppose I never think of that? Every night I say to myself, 'Another day has gone ; another day of false hopes, false friends, false loves, false hates, false griefs !' Think of it ! Not even a real grief : my life, myself, all—all a sham !"

"Help me to be as honest as you are," said Wiche : "is there not eternity before us ? the longest past

is but a second in comparison. See!" he said, kissing her, "we have forgotten it already!"

Men may still find oblivion in a kiss, but women of fashion are always—or nearly always—too self-conscious to forget the artificialities of life in the verities of passion.

"Forgotten already?" repeated Lady Mallinger, moving away from him, "I wish it were. Do not be angry with me, but I must be alone a little. There are so many things to think about—so many things. Give me half-an-hour."

"So much?" said her lover.

"Have we not eternity before us?" she replied.

Wiche laughed, kissed both her hands, and went out on to the Terrace: he found it almost as delightful to obey her whims as to worship her beauty. Only the strong-minded can know the extreme pleasure

of self-surrender. Wiche's life had been so hard, so serious, and, in a sense, so wise until this too-enchanting present that he seized its madness rather as a reward from the gods than a curse. He put all thought of the future from his mind—not because he feared it, but because it possessed no attraction for him. Lady Mallinger was an inexhaustible delight: egoism, which in any other woman seemed intolerable was, in her case, the most charming thing in the world: selfishness, he argued, where the self was so perfectly bewitching even amounted to a duty: dull, tedious, and unpleasant beings did well to lose sight of themselves, but for Lilian to forget herself would be like a flower forgetting to bloom.

When Wiche had gone Lilian paced the floor and mistook this bodily exercise for deep thought.

She was brought to a standstill by finding herself face to face with Teresa, who, not being able to quiet her soul, had returned in the hope of seeing Wiche once more.

“You look depressed,” she said to Lady Mallinger : “at luncheon you were all vivacity, epigram, and paradox. If you had not told me I should never have suspected that you considered it your vocation to play the fool !”

“Ah, I am much wiser since our conversation this morning,” said Lady Mallinger. “I am sure that the supreme happiness of a woman’s life is to devote herself to the man who loves her : to be his friend, his ideal, his good angel !”

Teresa smiled bitterly. “And the supreme difficulty of a woman’s life,” she said, “is to find the man who desires such devotion, who *has* an ideal, who *wants* a good angel !”

The best of men only ask us to be forever young and forever pretty : let your conscience go to the dogs but keep your freshness. Virtue never yet atoned for wrinkles ! ”

“ There I cannot agree with you, ” said Lady Mallinger. “ I am sure that there is nothing so fascinating as sincerity ! It is so uncommon. I am going to be the most sincere woman in the world and I must begin by telling you that I was present just now during your conversation with Mr. Wiche. ”

“ What conversation ? ” said Teresa.

“ Let us both be sincere, dear Miss Warcop ! I was sitting in that green chair when you mentioned my name, my first impulse was to rush forward : curiosity, however, intervened, and I remained in my corner. Perhaps this was wrong, but my position was diffi-

cult : to begin with, I agreed perfectly with every word you said : you were only too charitable. I assured Mr. Wiche of this afterwards, but he would not believe me. When I told him that I had indeed neither mind, morals, heart, nor beauty, he looked so incredulous, and was so deaf to all argument that I despair of convincing him ! Men are so prejudiced. What would you advise me to do ? ”

“ This sarcasm does not cut ! ”

“ Sarcasm ! ” cried Lilian, “ I was never more candid, more natural, more absolutely transparent in my life. Why should I dissemble when I have found that you know me even better than I know myself ? ”

“ This innocent air may deceive some infatuated man—for a time, ” said Teresa, “ but I understand it

too well. How can you dare to look so amiable when you know that you hate me. . . . You *must* hate me."

"Not at all : I think you are indiscreet and perhaps too impulsive, but, on the whole, I admire your character : it has a stability, a doggedness, a courage which mine lacks. I would never have the audacity, for instance, to discuss your faults with Sir Ventry. He would, I hope, be quite as blind with regard to you as my future husband is where I am concerned."

"Your future husband?" said Teresa.

"Yes," said Lady Mallinger. "Sidney was foolish enough to ask me to be his wife—at least, in so many words—and I was wise enough to accept him ! If he will only trust me and believe in me always—if he will only see me—

not as I am, but as I should be—I am sure we shall be happy !”

“It is not hard to be good when you have love and sympathy and encouragement,” said Teresa, warmly, “but to be good when not one soul cares whether you live or die, when your kindest thoughts, your least selfish acts, your dearest sacrifices are treated alike with insult, cruelty, and contempt—to be good then, that is the great achievement. Stand alone, be indifferent to smiles and frowns, keep your eyes steadily fixed on one unattainable ideal and condemn in yourself all that falls short of it, do that and I will call you happy ! Defy slander, defy the malice of evil tongues and false hearts, defy even one rule of etiquette !”

“No woman has anything to fear except the truth,” said Lady Malinger, “so long as the truth will

bear telling, she can laugh at lies. They may for a time work mischief, but only for a time."

"I, too, could have such a faith in the triumph of virtue if I had such a lover as Sidney!" said Teresa, "but live my life for a month and then tell me your philosophy!"

"You look cold," murmured Lilian, after a shiver and a slight pause.

"Cold! I am always cold: feel my hand."

Lady Mallinger held it to her own pink cheeks. "You make me like you," she said. "As a rule I do not care for women, and you are almost as spiteful as the rest. But there is something about you. . . . You believe me, when I say I like you?"

"Yet you have robbed me of my one friend," cried Teresa, "you—you who have so much already.

You are young and he thinks you are beautiful : I shall soon be old and I was always plain : many men have loved my money, but no one has ever loved *me*. In the Convent—I was brought up in a Convent—the sisters taught me how to live in Heaven : they forgot I had to get through the world first. My parents are dead and now I have nothing in this life except my wretched, hopeless interest in a man who has never given me a thought. Perhaps I need not say that. He is the only man I know who has not asked me to marry him, so I think he must like me a little. And he comes to see me very often. But you only care for him because he flatters you, you are proud of him because he is distinguished, but I was proud of him when he was poor and obscure, when every one thought him an outcast, when it

was almost a crime in our miserable little corner of society to be seen even bowing to him. You do not understand him as I do: you cannot help him as I could: you play on all his weaknesses: every hour he spends with you will be a step backwards. Oh! he is no hero in my eyes, no passionless, faultless machine, but a Man. . . . Go! tell him all I have said, laugh at me, pity me, say 'Poor woman! That so plain and dull a creature should fall in love! How pathetic! how ridiculous!'"

Before Lilian could reply, Teresa rushed out of the room. Lady Mallinger rubbed her eyes: she, too, had once loved like this and she had been deceived. The mere remembrance of Saville drove all other thoughts from her mind: she forgot Wiche, she forgot Teresa, she forgot everything—the universe

contained but two beings—herself and Rookes. Fate brought him to her at that critical moment.

“I have been for a stroll with Sir Ventry,” he began awkwardly. “I—I am wretched. Are you still angry?”

“I do not think we can have anything to say to each other, Saville,” she said; “the last words were spoken this morning. I could wish they had been kinder: I should like to remember that we parted, at least as friends. We were so much to each other once—once we thought it could never come to this. . . . Please leave me.”

“No, I have been longing for a chance to speak to you, now I have found it, you must listen. I will not attempt to defend myself—I——”

“You cannot: how could you?”

You might perhaps say that you became desperate about your debts, and so—in a sort of madness—thought to marry Felicia for her money. You might say—ah, a thousand things, but they could make no difference. It is too late to think of them.”

“Too late?” said Rookes. “How can it be too late when you are there and I am here.” He knelt down by her side and, custom proving too strong for him, kissed her cheek. Custom was, perhaps, too strong for her also: at all events, she made no resistance. “You know my faults,” he went on, “you could never have loved me for my perfection.”

“I loved the man you might have been,” she murmured, “not you at all.” She glanced down and found her hand lying in his. “Not you at all,” she repeated. “Be-

sides . . . it really is too late. I
—I have lost the right to listen to
you.”





VII.

IN the meantime Wiche's half-hour had come to an end. The clock was chiming five when he appeared at the drawing-room window. Rookes sprang to his feet: Lady Mallinger affected to laugh.

“My cousin is teasing me,” she said; “he will not let me tell him that I am really a very serious woman. He—he does not believe in me as you do!” As she spoke she touched Wiche's arm as though to assert her ownership. Neither of the men spoke: a footman

entered and announced that tea was served on the lawn.

“We must go then,” said Lilian. She led the way, but when she turned, she found that only Wiche had followed her.

“It is as well,” she said, in her prettiest manner ; “we are happier by ourselves !” This was no doubt charming, and it may have been true. Wiche, however, was no less troubled by the fact than the possibility. Both were distracting, for, at that moment, he wished to overlook her fascination and think only of what was certain. And the one thing certain was, in his judgment, her love for Rookes. This truth—like all truths—had flashed upon him like a message from his guardian angel.

“Do not look so grave,” said Lady Mallinger ; “we have been serious the whole afternoon, and

now I want to rest! Do you like me in pink? Because I have the loveliest pink satin which I am dying to wear this evening."

"How old are you?" he said, suddenly.

"Oh! My dear, dear Sidney! One can see that you have never made love before! How old am I? I forget: I was born so long ago. I must be at least twenty-two. Of course, I look even more, but then my life has been so unhappy. Now it will all be different, and perhaps I shall grow young again. You will be kind to me, will you not? And patient? And you will not expect to find me very good, and very truthful, and very quiet all at once. You will give me time? And you will not often be as cross as you are now, will you?" At length she saw it was useless to ignore the demon who sat between

them. "It was not my fault," she said, "it really was not my fault. I told Saville I had lost the right to listen to him. And now you are blaming me. It is so hard that I must always be made miserable—even when I have made up my mind to be contented. I have tried my very best," she added, "to be happy this afternoon!"

"Was it such an effort?" said Wiche.

"All—all is an effort," she answered, "except folly. That seems the only easy, natural, and pleasant thing in the world!"

"What do you call folly?"

"Everything I want to do, everything I want to say, everything I care for—that is what I call folly."

"My dear," said Wiche, "you are in love. And Rookes is the man!"

"Tut! How little you know

me! I admit that I am greatly attached to Saville—in spite of his faults, but then I have known him so long! But in love with him—never! We are the dearest friends possible, and quarrel incessantly—but that is all!”

“Are you sure?” said Wiche,
“are you sure that is all?”

She made no answer, but, soothing her lace which fluttered a little in the breeze, hummed without knowing it,

“Virtue how frail it is!
Friendship how rare!
Love, how it sells poor bliss
For proud despair!”

“That,” said Wiche, gravely,
“is what Rookes was singing last evening.”

“Pity me,” she murmured.

“Why?”

“I adore him!”

While we exist we can never escape any stage of development ; if our infancy be prematurely wise, our years of discretion will have an inappropriate childishness. Lilian was living life backwards, and her sudden moods of immaturity which may have accounted for Rookes's corresponding moods of fickleness, filled Wiche with dismay. Passion in these circumstances was impossible : affection became angelic, and sentiment lost all question of sex.

“I adore Saville,” she repeated, and looked at Wiche with so beseeching an air, with such utter helplessness and irresponsibility that he wondered how he could ever have mistaken her for a woman. He still recognized her grace and beauty, but it roused in him the same kind of emotion a man might feel on seeing the child

of one he had loved deeply and who was dead. It was a sorrowful task to trace the resemblance: to note the likeness in line, and delicate tones and expression: to say to himself, "Lilian's mouth had that curve, her eyes were that color, her throat was as white?"

"You must forget," he said, "you must forget—if you have not already forgotten—all that passed this afternoon. It was a great mistake."

It was a great mistake. Lady Mallinger brushed the echo of these words from her ear: she would not believe that they had ever been uttered. "This is what comes," she thought, "of telling a man the truth: he flies!"

"You may have made a mistake," she replied, "but I have said nothing to you which I could ever wish to unsay. Saville told me this

morning that men may fall in love dozens of times, but that each experience is new. They can only love once one way. This is true of women also. And it all comes to this: love is precisely the same kind of emotion as religion. Oh, if we would only be as patient with human nature as God is! Some days we are more devout than others: the saint who appeals to you in one mood may repel you in another: this month we devote ourselves to Our Lady, and another to St. Paul; some people, too, mistake incense for dogma, and love of music for love of virtue. But the folly and sensuousness of creatures like myself cannot touch the great unalterable truths. I may never know them as they are, but they have been known. You will wonder what I am trying to tell you. It is hard to say: I believe I mean that

my adoration of Saville is not very serious ! ”

Wiche was a man who had learnt what he knew of human nature through self-discipline and not through self-abandon. Knowing therefore his own character and its possibilities so well, he was astonished to find that Lilian's was so like—subject, of course, to certain feminine modifications. He was acquainted with many men who could give an accurate appraisal of each and all their impulses, thoughts, and emotions, who were such skilled self-analysts that they never by any chance confounded their soul with their body, or their conscience with either. He had never met a woman, however, who possessed this power even in a slight and half-unconscious degree ; he looked at Lilian and felt that while she had cured him of his fit of love,

she had never seemed so deeply interesting as a fellow-creature.

“My dear,” he said, “you must surely see that we should be wretched if we married.”

“Why?” said Lilian, “it would be such a comfort to me to have some one I could really trust and believe in; some one who would help me to be serious; to know one being at least who was not led away by all manner of idle fancies!”

The irony of the situation would have been ludicrous if it had not been so heart-breaking.

“Do not imagine that I am that one being,” said Wiche, hastily. “God knows I am flimsy enough. And I am afraid it is always disastrous to pin one’s faith to a mere mortal. Even the best of us are miserably imperfect as rocks of defence; you see we are flesh-and-blood, we are not granite.”

“Treat me as though I had a mind, Sidney,” she said, “and I will follow you to the ends of the earth!”

“I do not think,” he stammered, “we could ever be happy together.”

“You mean,” said Lady Mallinger, “that you do not care for me in the way you thought.”

“I will always be your friend,” he said, firmly, “but——” Her sense of what was just and meet told her that it only remained now to call her soul into her eyes, gaze mournfully at Wiche, and leave him. Saville after all loved her the best.

Women like Lady Mallinger have to die young in order to be understood: then—and then not always—some onlooker more discerning than the others will see in the cold body some trace of a fiery spirit too ardent and too restless for mortality.

Alas ! poor soul. Seeking the highest, best, most beautiful, and purest—and finding a Saville Rookes.

The modern is always an unwilling slave to sentiment : if he find himself captivated by a romantic love or a sublime ideal he accepts his state in the shamefaced and hopeless certainty that his common-sense will one day come to the rescue. He cannot believe that what he takes for beauty will always be so fair, or that what seems good for the moment could be inspiring forever. Satisfaction only makes him restless : he sighs for happiness and, having found it, sighs lest, after all, it should only be a shadow cast by his own desires. Wiche therefore suffered his disappointment with smiling patience and with something even of relief ; once he had doubted that all was vanity, had suspected that life yet held

much that was precious and desirable, that love was an immortal fact, and endured. He felt now that he need struggle no longer against despair, and, abandoning himself to the intense pleasures of profound melancholy, became agreeably tired of existence. To his unspeakable resentment, however, one shining thought pierced the blackness of his thoughts. Teresa still remained. But she had never been his ideal. Teresa was Teresa—a vivid, distinct personality, a being whom no amount of romantic disguise could make seem other than she was, and who was incomparable, not because of her singular merits, but because no one else had the same faults.





VIII.

SIR VENTRY COXE had been educated in the belief that his cousin Teresa loved him madly. When he married Lady Susan Hoppe-Gardner, a chorus went up from all the members of his family. "What on earth will poor Teresa do?" She was present at the wedding, nevertheless, and seemed in the best possible spirits: the relations looked wise and murmured that it was impossible for the unhappy girl to deceive *them*. Ventry was particularly kind to her; he clasped her hand warmly when he started on his honeymoon and

thanked her again and again with tears in his eyes for her magnificent gift in the shape of a diamond necklace for his bride : every one said it was too touching for words, several ladies declared that Teresa grew as white as a sheet and would have swooned if Lord Twacorbie, with his ready tact, had not led her to the air.

A few years passed ; Miss Warcop refused all offers ; Lady Susan died. This, all the relations said, was Fate. Sir Ventry, remembering Teresa's rent-roll, thought so too. He decided to make her his wife when a decent period of mourning had elapsed ; there was no hurry, she was there, ready, waiting, and willing, when he wanted her.

The day at last dawned when it seemed convenient to address her on the subject : he met her in the hall as she left the drawing-room

after her scene with Lady Mallinger. She was greatly embarrassed, a fact which he easily attributed to her sudden encounter with himself. Smiling magnanimously, he waited until she had regained her composure.

“Shall we go into the garden?” he suggested.

No, she was feeling rather tired; she had a slight headache; he would find her a very dull companion.

“*Do* come,” he said, in his most persuasive manner.

Teresa, who was always amused at his conceit, and who had a motherly, pitying affection for the weaknesses which did duty for his character, yielded the point and followed him. He began to talk of former days: he reminded her of his five-and-twentieth birthday, when she gave him a hunter and wore a black cloak lined with scarlet.

“You look awfully well in scarlet,” he observed. She blushed: scarlet was Wiche’s favorite color. Sir Ventry, however, took the blush to himself.

“I always admired you, you know,” he said; “there is not a woman in the family who has got such a complexion, and your eyelashes are so long.”

“It is very nice of you to say so,” said Teresa: “I, myself, do not think they are bad. Once or twice I have thought I looked quite decent!”

He glanced at her sideways. Was she really so plain as all the women made out?

“I am awfully fond of you,” he said suddenly.

Teresa was by no means dense. “My dear Ventry,” she said, with rather a nipping air, “let us talk like reasonable beings.”

“I am quite serious,” he replied.
“Will you marry me, Teresa?”

“Certainly not. You must be mad.”

“What!”

“You must be mad. And think yourself very lucky that I forgive you for making such an insulting suggestion.” Trembling with anger she left him. He looked up to see whether the Heavens were falling.





IX.

TERESA sat alone in the drawing-room before dinner that evening. The lamps were lit and their hazy light fell on the orange velvet draperies, the vases of blue Sevres, the Chinese embroideries on scarlet satin, the copper bowls, the tiger skins and the Indian shawls. Teresa loved colour, gorgeous sunsets, the blare of trumpets, loud music—all that could send some note of the tremendous into the undramatic tragedy of her existence. To-night she wore a gown of silver brocade: lace concealed her neck, and long sleeves

her arms, but neither brocade nor lace could hide the slight, almost angular figure of their wearer. She held a book of devotions in her lap, the leaves of which she turned at random, but her glance fell now on the clock, and now on the mirror—rarely on the volume and its grotesque old woodcuts of saints and ecstatic virgins. At last the sound of footsteps in the corridor without, and the opening of a door, marred the disquieting repose of her vigil. She let fall the book of prayers: the little crash it made on striking the floor and the rustle of her silk petticoat drowned the words of greeting which she addressed to Wiche, who now entered.

He chose a chair near hers, but she, half-unconsciously, shrank back. He was too engrossed in his own thoughts, however, to notice the movement.

“I fear I seemed most ungrateful this afternoon,” he said, “but I felt quite sure that you would one day understand Lady Mallinger, and know, as I do, the real woman. Perhaps I should say the real child.”

“When I spoke,” said Teresa, in a low voice, “I did not know that you loved her. And she has charmed away my prejudice since then. I will frankly admit that I did not wish to discover anything bewitching either in her face or in her manner. I only wanted to have the right to detest her with a clear conscience !”

“Yet, in spite of all this, she conquered you?”

“She conquered me,” repeated Teresa, “but let me say one thing—she is too romantic : she lives by moonlight.”

Wiche laughed. “She has seen a great deal of the world,” he said,

“and I have often been struck by her extraordinary, almost terrible common-sense. She may have a certain amount of sentimentalism in her brain, but at heart she is cold and critical. This ache to be amused, this longing to hear music in the air, to see beauty on all sides, to find life one ever-new, yet ever-abiding pleasure, these are the fierce, never-gratified desires of those who love only themselves. But to him who loves others—even one other”—he found himself looking into Teresa’s eyes—“even one other—the commonest things seem rare, the blackest shadows have a radiance indescribable, and the harshest notes are heavenly melodies : disappointment, bitterness, and desolation have no part in his existence !”

“These exalted moods are brief—terribly brief,” said Teresa, “and

they show us just enough of our lost divinity to make us ever more wretched as mere mortals and children of Adam. It is the day after, the days after, the weeks, months, years after, when we can only remember that once we were happy for half-an-hour !” She seemed to have forgotten Wiche’s presence, and he felt that she was thinking of something in her own experience in which he bore no part. It was certain that she could have no knowledge of his love-adventure with Lady Mallinger, and he could not make up his mind to tell her the news just then.

“I wonder,” he said, abruptly, “I have often wondered why you are the only one in the world I can talk to without the dread of saying either more or less than I mean.”

“I will tell you why,” she answered : “I could never misunderstand you, Sidney, because I love

you." Although she was a woman in whom the coquette was, at all events, slumbering, her primmest, least emotional manner had the mysterious charm of those things which we note unmoved and remember with passionate interest. She made her declaration of love so quietly that Wiche saw neither its oddness, nor, indeed, its full meaning: he colored a little, however, at the sense her words might have conveyed.

"Do not think I am choosing phrases at random," she went on, "I meant what I said. There is only one thing in my life which I can be grateful for—that is my love for yourself. Many people would think it very unwomanly on my part to tell you this; I am only proud to know that I am capable of loving any one. All affection seems to have been laughed out of the

world : when it is not ridiculous, it is thought hysterical. To me it remains and always must remain, the greatest—the only perfect gift—that God has given us. So I have told you.” Her lips trembled a little as she added, “I suppose, too, you have heard it already from Lady Mallinger?”

“What could I hear from Lady Mallinger,” he asked, growing more and more bewildered. Teresa’s expression was so frigid though her words were so kind. “I am sure we are talking at cross-purposes.”

“Do you mean to say,” she stammered, “that she never told you all—all I said to her this afternoon?”

“She has never uttered your name.”

Teresa hid her face in her hands and forced back her tears. She had needlessly betrayed her secret.

“I will explain,” she said, at last. “Lady Mallinger told me this afternoon that she was going to marry you : we had some words and I—I confessed quite plainly what I—I said just now. And I thought she would surely repeat it—so—in order to avoid any misapprehension—I decided to let you hear it from me also. It needed courage, but now all my courage has gone—I had only enough for that. It wanted so much. Do not say a word ; please go.”

“Lady Mallinger is not going to marry me,” he said, quietly.

He touched Teresa’s hand, and conquered his impulse to kiss it : that was not the moment, nor indeed could he imagine a time when it might be the moment. She seemed to stand in an enchanted circle. Suddenly, he saw that she was crying. This touch of weak-

ness seemed to supply the one thing he had always missed in her character. Teresa had, as a rule, a self-command which was almost forbidding — even her occasional indiscretions had something well-considered and reasonable. She lacked that inconsequence, that capriciousness, that delicious nonsense which most men and all strong natures find so alluring and adorable. To see her weeping, therefore, was to behold a new creature. Wiche was uncertain how to reply, when she herself, brushing the tears from her cheeks, asked him a question.

“Why?” she said, “why are you not going to marry Lady Mallinger?”

“I want to tell you about that,” he said. “I am afraid that there is not time to tell the whole story now. But Lady Mallinger discovered that she had made a mis-

take, she loved some one else, and I—I have been such a fool, Teresa, such a fool! I do not know whether I love you or not. I only know that I hate my life when you are not near me!" This truth, which had been sleeping so long, woke at the first whisper of its name: he realized how pitiably little would remain to him if Teresa were taken from his memory: it was her very oneness with his own mind which had made him overlook her: when he imagined he was thinking of himself he was thinking of Teresa also.

"I only know," he said once more, "that I hate my life when you are not near me!"

She could have wished that he had expressed himself with less egotism; if he cared for her at all it was because she was necessary to his peace of soul: at least, so it sounded. But she was a woman

who found her happiness in giving and loving : she made no demands ; she looked neither for gratitude, nor homage, nor appreciation ; she only asked the right to give and to love. So she gave Wiche her hand ; her heart had been his from the beginning.

“Without you,” she said, “I have no life to hate !”

This may have been weak, but Teresa was not strong-minded. And perhaps it is as well for those of us who are proud and self-reliant that just such simple, undignified, and affectionate creatures are to be found here and there. They may speak for us on Judgment Day, which will be the longest, darkest, and coldest, this world has seen.





X.

WHICH CONTAINS A LETTER WRITTEN
THE SAME EVENING BY LADY TWA-
CORBIE TO HER HUSBAND.

“ ARDEN LODGE,
“ NEAR WENSLEY,
“ MERTFORD.

“ MY DEAR HAROLD,—I am so annoyed and disgusted that I can scarcely hold my pen. Wiche has proposed to *Teresa*, and has been accepted. What could be more outrageous than such conduct? As for *Teresa*, you know I always thought her dreadfully sly. How any woman could prefer Wiche to *Ventry*! But there, what on earth

does Wiche see in Teresa? Van Huyster told me in the course of conversation at dinner that he is engaged to some American person in Paris, and that he hopes to persuade her to marry him on the *Fourth of July*. We must really be more careful in future about whom we invite to the house. Lilian and Rookes are flirting in the most unexpected manner. I thought they could not *bear* each other. *Nothing* however, would astonish me in that direction after the surprises of this day. I believe that I am the only sane person in the house. Thank goodness, they all go to-morrow. I long for rest. Felicia seems hysterical; I never knew a girl of seventeen with so many nerves. She must go on with that steel tonic and take fencing lessons.

“Your affectionate wife.

“CHARLOTTE TWACORBIE.

“P.S.—Spalding has just been in to say that he and Danby wish to get married this day month! What could be more tiresome? I begged him to reconsider it, but he said it was too late. He had made up his mind.

“P.S. No. 2.—Ventry has given me to understand that he proposed to Teresa this afternoon, and that she seemed quite annoyed. He is furious, and blames ME. I dare not tell him about Wiche.”



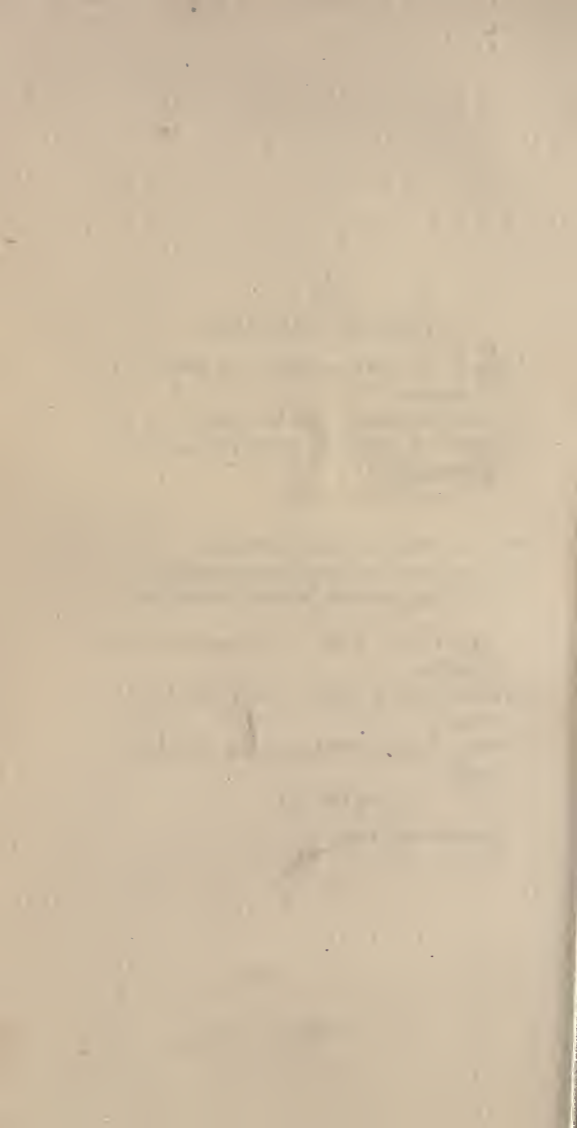
TO
WALTER SPINDLER.

AH, not for me—to learn the truth by
dreaming,
To hear the cries of earth in melody,
To know 'tis night but when the stars are
gleaming,—
Ah, not for me.

Music of form and colour's mystery,
The joy of fashioning in fairest seeming
Life's dullest clay and Winter's barest tree;

To count the years as moments—only
deeming
That truly Time which makes thy Art to
thee
The one thing needful and the all-redeem-
ing,—
Ah, not for me!

September 23, 1893.





EPILOGUE.

*Spoken by a Daughter of Eve, who is weeping,
and an Angel, who looks out of fashion.*

THE ANGEL.

This is only Sorrow
For To-Day.
Life begins To-Morrow !

A DAUGHTER OF EVE.

So they say.

THE ANGEL.

Life with love and laughter
Gay and free—
Yet no heartache after.

A DAUGHTER OF EVE.

Can it be ?

THE ANGEL.

Life with work that reaches
To the sky ;

Life that never teaches
How to die.
Life that is eternal,
Ever young,
Ever bright and vernal
Just begun!

A DAUGHTER OF EVE.

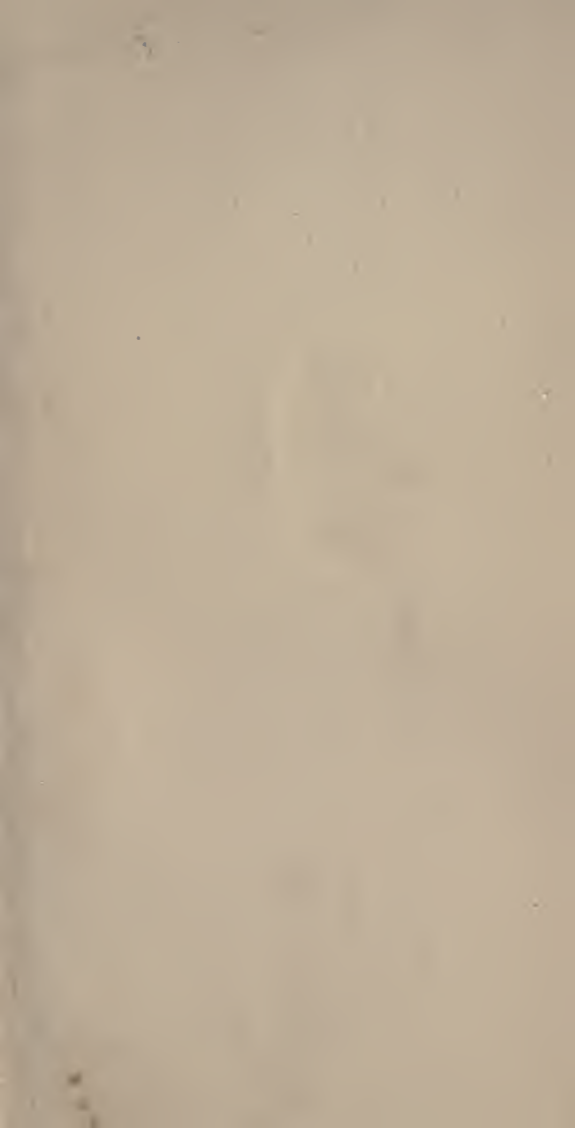
Will To-Morrow ever dawn?
Shall we wake that golden morn
But to see
All the treasures gained by tears,
All the faith that's won by fears—
Vanity?

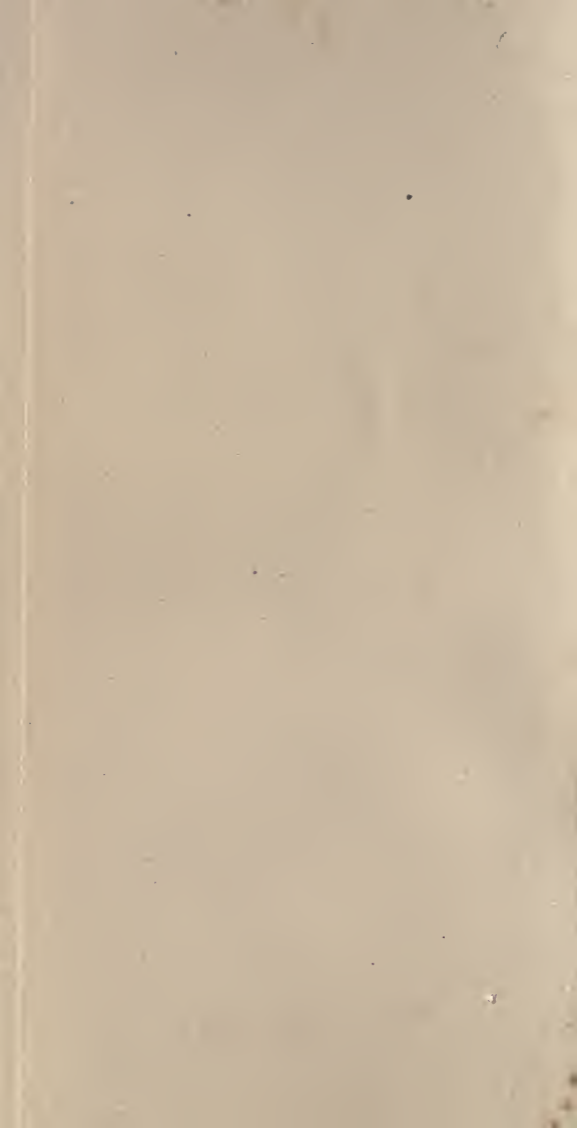
THE ANGEL.

Doubter, look behind thee
In the past,
All the dreams that pleased thee
Did one last?
Is a wish remaining
From thy youth?
This thou art retaining
If 'twas truth.
Mortal passions sicken,
Fade away—
Love alone can quicken
Earthly clay.
Faith, and all endeavour
That is pure,
Hope, and Love, for ever
These endure.

All things else are folly
To the wise,—
Quit thy melancholy
And thy sighs !









MAY
26
1904



276

**PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE
CARDS OR SLIPS FROM THIS POCHE**

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRAR

